

Groundwater Committee January 2007

Mission

The Groundwater Committee was formed in 1996 to support the Board's Basin Planning process to help gather and evaluate information on groundwater quality and beneficial uses region-wide. The Groundwater Committee serves as a forum through which Water Board staff can share expertise on particular topics among other Water Board staff and outside agencies that participate with the committee. The Groundwater Committee also provides Water Board staff the opportunity to work on groundwater quality issues that lie beyond the scope of typical case-specific work. Through the committee, staff has conducted in-house technical trainings on the basics of hydrogeology and groundwater contamination issues; prepared summaries of innovative groundwater remediation technologies successfully implemented within and outside the region; developed and presented basin plan amendments to the Board; and prepared groundwater beneficial use evaluation reports for three sub-basins within Region 2. The committee benefits from the inclusion of outside-agency collaborators such as the Santa Clara Valley Water District, Alameda County Water District, San Francisco PUC, Zone 7 Water Agency, East Bay MUD, Alameda Co. Environmental Health, San Mateo County Environmental Health, Solano Co. Environmental Management, and Napa Co. Environmental Health.

Discussion

The GW committee adds value to the Water Board's mission by identifying opportunities to better protect water resources and providing background materials needed to support basin planning efforts. Since its formation, the committee has prepared four documents aimed at identifying and evaluating current and historic groundwater beneficial uses and protection strategies. The most recent of these reports (South Bay Report, May 2003) describes existing local, state, and federal groundwater cleanup and protection programs, identifies gaps in regulatory programs, and provides recommendations to facilitate better coordination of such programs with other agencies and stakeholders.

Previous Groundwater Committee Projects/Reports:

- Groundwater Protection Strategy for the Napa River Watershed - A Geographic Information System Demonstration Project, April 1996.
- San Francisco and Northern San Mateo County Pilot Beneficial Use Designation Project, April 1996.
- East Bay Plain Groundwater Basin Beneficial Use Evaluation Report, Alameda and Contra Costa Counties, CA, June 1999.
- A Comprehensive Groundwater Protection Evaluation for the South San Francisco Bay Basins, May 2003.

Current Projects

In June 2006, the Groundwater Committee reviewed the needs and interests of Water Board members and local agency participants for conducting future projects. A comprehensive list of potential projects was developed and ranked based on interest and priority. Two projects were selected and are currently being conducted:

1. “Low-Risk” or Low-Threat” Criteria for Solvent-Impacted Groundwater Cleanup Sites

The goal of this project is to develop low-risk or low-threat criteria for solvent sites that would enable staff to better prioritize their workload and ultimately help the Water Board direct its limited resources and attention to higher risk/threat priorities. The criteria could help the Water Board improve management of cleanup resources and decision-making consistency by providing guidance to Water Board staff, responsible parties, consultants, and other stakeholders about when it is appropriate to move solvent sites toward closure or no further active remediation (i.e., monitoring) and when it may be more appropriate to request additional work, including a higher degree of site characterization and/or remediation.

2. Emerging Contaminants Strategy to Flag and Evaluate Threats to Groundwater

The goal of this project is to develop a strategy and/or process to acknowledge and respond to emerging contaminants that have significant potential to threaten groundwater resources by virtue of their source(s), occurrence, fate, transport, toxicity, etc. For purposes of this project, “emerging” generally means those contaminants (or groups of contaminants) that have either already been identified in groundwater to some extent or are believed to pose significant threat to groundwater, but for which no enforceable or widely accepted groundwater standard or regulatory approach exists. Such a strategy would address the threat priority, identify and prioritize “new” emerging contaminants, and demonstrate a proactive stance toward emerging contaminants that threaten groundwater resources.

Other ongoing activities

- *Quarterly Presentations:* The Groundwater Committee typically meets quarterly and schedules 1 or 2 presentations by Water Board staff, outside agencies, vendors, or consultants regarding water supply, groundwater protection, and/or groundwater cleanup issues. These meetings are a good opportunity make contacts with other agencies and learn more about their interests/priorities regarding groundwater issues in the Bay Area.
- *Electronic Plume Reporting:* Refine and expand the electronic plume reporting project conducted in 2000/2001 to allow annual web-based reporting of groundwater plume maps and data. This project would make plume maps for groundwater cleanup sites accessible to consultants, dischargers and the general public and could be implemented through the states Geotracker database.
- *Groundwater/Surface Water Interactions:* Develop strategies for integrating groundwater concerns into the management of watersheds, and vice versa. This topic is currently being addressed by subcommittee.
- *Groundwater Basin Plan Amendments:* Continue effort toward approval of selected groundwater amendments previously adopted by the S.F. Bay Water Board in 2000.
- *Groundwater Web Page:* Design a web page on the Region 2 internet site to highlight news, issues, and initiatives concerning groundwater committee activities, groundwater quality and protection issues, cleanup programs, and to facilitate information sharing and outreach

- *Institutional Controls*: Develop a strategy for documenting and managing compliance with institutional controls (such as deed restrictions) at groundwater cleanup sites
- *Vertical Conduits*: Develop Water Board guidance for conducting vertical conduit searches as part of the investigation and cleanup process under all groundwater cleanup and protection programs.

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